

Walter E. Riedel

**Exiled in Canada:  
Literary and Related Forms of  
Cultural Life in the Internment Camps**

A collection of writings and drawings entitled "Gay and Serious Poetry and Songs of My Internment 1940-1941" contains the following cartoon drawing: A young internee, with a distraught facial expression and holding his registration book in his hands, is shown sitting on a mound of earth tightly surrounded by a barbed wire fence in a vast and empty landscape. The mound carries the inscription "Canada." A similar message is expressed by Carl Weiselberger in one of his autobiographical short stories written during his internment in Canada. He perceives the world of the prisoners held in the barbed wire compound somewhere in a Canadian forest as a cage, and their lives as an "absurd theater," in which nameless and defenseless refugees driven from country to country act out their meaningless roles (Weiselberger 1981, 64, 81; Riedel 1983). The drawings and the writings belong to a small, yet significant body of special exile art. The literature in question comprises writings by Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany and Austria who had sought refuge or asylum in Great Britain before World War II, but were interned as enemy aliens after the outbreak of hostilities. Nearly three thousand of them were later transferred to Canadian camps; they were located in New Brunswick (Camp "B" in Little River), Quebec ("L" in Quebec City, "T" in Trois Rivières, "I" on the Ile aux Noix in Montreal, "N" in Sherbrooke, "A" in Farnham), and Ontario ("Q" in Monteith, "R" in Red Rock). The story of how Britain, in the wake of the fall of Holland, Belgium and France interned some thirty thousand German, Austrian and Italian nationals—among them Jewish refugees—has been told in Britain by Peter and Leni Gillman (1980) and Ronald Stent (1980); in Canada by Paula Draper (1978), Eric Koch (1980) and Harry Rasky (1981). Irving Abella's and Harold Troper's study *None is Too Many* (1982) on Canada's closed-door immigration policy to Jews completed the social-historical chapter of these "accidental immigrants."



Though historical, political and sociological aspects of the internment of the so-called "enemy aliens" have received a great deal of attention, the creative literature (in its widest sense) written in these camps has only just begun to be critically assessed. Claims have been made that within the barbed wire compound, "without liberty," literature or culture in general "can neither be maintained nor grow" (K[rämer] 1941, 5). Yet H. G. Adler, a writer who experienced exile in a Nazi prison camp, states the opposite view in his address entitled "Dichtung in der Gefangenschaft als inneres Exil" (1980). Adler witnessed how even in the prison camps of the Nazi state, wherever there was a semblance of privacy, artistic activities—literature, drawing or painting, music, theater—were practiced. He claims that these activities served individuals' "cultural needs" and suggests that we may interpret their writings as an expression of their personal resistance, their "statement of inner exile" (Adler 1980, 22–23). Not only in the prison camps of the Nazi state has the occurrence of literary, artistic, or other cultural activities been documented; the internment camps in Britain, Canada and Australia are also cases in point, suggesting that literature or, more generally, intellectual activity of a cultural nature, may be seen as having a specific function for the exiles or internees. Michael Seyfert's study, appropriately entitled *Im Niemandsland: Deutsche Exilliteratur in britischer Internierung: Ein unbekanntes Kapitel der Kulturgeschichte des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (1984), which deals mainly with internment camps in Britain, begs the question of the Canadian component of this chapter. By focusing briefly on themes and imagery of literary and related artistic expression from Canadian internment camps, I hope to show the functional value of this artistic expression in the internees' coming to terms with their internment, a measure which Koch has convincingly described as a "wartime blunder."

The existence of a significant body of literature written by Jewish refugees in Canadian internment camps was not generally known until recently. Yet during the relatively short period between 1940 and 1942, a great deal was written in the camps: poems, short stories, diaries, a manuscript of a novel, at least one anthology, as well as some selections written retrospectively after release from internment. The main problem researchers face still lies in locating and collecting this literature. Writings of camp inmates were subject to censorship, and opportunities for publication within the camps were very limited. Though most camps had camp newspapers or periodicals, they included only a few literary selections. A great deal of what internees wrote was read or recited to fellow internees and later remained hidden in drawers and suitcases. Some of these writings survived in manuscript form and found their way into special archives (Weiselberger's papers are now in the McPherson Library in Victoria, BC; Koch's and Charles Wassermann's papers are in the Ethnic Archives of the National Library of Canada in Ottawa). Some selections were set to music and survived as camp songs. Other writings were published long after the internees were released (Henry Kreisel's *Diary of an Internment* [1974] and selections in *Another Country* [1985], Weiselberger's *Auswahl seiner Schriften* [1981], and *Zum Olymp*,



wenn ich bitten darf: Zwölf Dichterkameen [1982]). Taken as a whole, this literature clearly belongs to the larger context of exile and exile literature, which, in the light of recent research, recognizes that exile is not a strictly limited period from 1933 to 1945 (Helmut F. Pfanner 1986), that it does not just pertain to an intellectual elite (Frühwald and Schieder 1981, 16), that writings by exiles have a very special authenticity deriving from the very experience of exile (Vordtriede 1968, 558) and that, with respect to exile literature, literary quality or merit may be considered secondary to the question of significance or of function of these writings for the writer as well as for his fellow exiles.

The essence of the internee's exile experience is best expressed in the musings of a Jewish protagonist in Richard Friedenthal's novel *Die Welt in der Nußschale*, a work which moved Seyfert to call his study of literature from the British internment camps *Im Niemandsland*: "We are nobody. . . . For the British, who interned us, we are Germans, for the Germans we are . . . well what are we for the Germans?" (Seyfert 1984, 6). Wolfgang Bretschneider, an internee in a Canadian camp, echoes a similar sense of lack of belonging and a feeling of isolation. One of his poems complains of the Canadian commandant angrily telling a well-known and once respected internee, Dr. G. Heckmann, a philosophy professor from Göttingen, "You're a nobody" ("So war's"). Common to the myriads of exiles who, in the wake of Hitler's rise to power, had to leave their own country and seek refuge wherever they could find it, are the loss of their homeland, their family, their profession and livelihood, their very identity and the feeling of loneliness and isolation in a foreign land. What makes their exile experience a special case is the fact that in their country of refuge, England, they were put behind barbed wire, transferred to camps in Canada and detained for two years before their status was changed to that of "refugee" and they could be released.

Koch's portrayal of the fate of the refugees who were "deemed suspect," shows that life in the internment camps, though not pleasant, was bearable; it was at any rate preferable to what could have been. After all, the refugees were alive, far removed from the arena of war (to the chagrin of some); they were well-fed and, as time passed, their educational, intellectual and recreational needs were well looked after through the efforts of the YMCA Prisoner of War Aid, the Red Cross and other relief organizations. Schools or universities with educational, cultural and recreational programs were organized in practically all camps; they provided a welcome relief from the very real boredom and stupor of the routines of camp life. Yet despite all this, the harsh reality of the camp remained: the barbed wire, the armed guards, the monotonous camp routines, the loss of family and friends, the total lack of privacy, the uncertainty about the outcome of the war and the question of how long they would remain incarcerated. This explains why so many succumbed to feelings of resignation or of depression; some internees called it "internitis."

It is no surprise that for these incarcerated men between sixteen and sixty years of age, the reality of the camp and their attempts to come to terms with their experience is central to their writing. Indeed the barbed



wire compound is a central symbol for their existence; from its perspective they perceive their world within as well as without the compound. In rhymes, ditties, anecdotes, songs and playlets, the camp—in tones ranging from serious to humorous, satiric and sarcastic—is portrayed as a human cage. It is a world cut off by wire and bayonets from the world outside, a world of rumors, uncertainty and organized monotony, consisting mainly of everyday routines of camp life: roll call, keeping the camp clean, preparing meals, eating, sleeping, walking along the fences for exercise. Camp regulations written in fractured and unretranslatable German, such as "Regulierungen vom Obersten G. Dorval Kommandant von das Konzentrierung Camp" or the "Kriegsgefangen Lager 'B' - Bekanntmachung" (Nielsen 1977, 190-91, 216-17) give an impression of the humorous linguistic ineptitude of the captors which glossed over the seriousness and absurdity of the "cages" they controlled:

- 1) Es ist streng verboten die Stachelzaun der Lager umringen binnen 25 fusz (9 meters) nahekomen. 2) Die Schildwachen Befehl haber einmahl werdaruhen mit das Worte: "Halt or I fire," und darauf schieszen. 3) Wann eine Kriegsgefangene ist werdageruft, er wird halten, die Hände aufheben und der Gebot der Schildwachen abwarten.

These are followed by other rules in Double Dutch regarding saluting of guards, camp administration, mail, smoking, escape attempts, punishment, etc.

Passing the time while waiting to be released became the major preoccupation of the internees during a course of events happening far-away and beyond their control. In a poem entitled "Im Rattenloch von Warth Mills," Alfred Becker reflects his feelings in language and imagery reminiscent of German Expressionism and of Rilke's "Panther": Becker compares himself to a caged animal prowling along the barbed wire fence, disquieted, angry, lying in wait, in a nauseating place where he has heard shrieks of desperation and longing that emerge from the dreams of his fellow inmates. Rilke's existential poem depicts the caged panther into whose pupil an image from the outside only sometimes enters and goes through the tense stillness of the limbs until it ceases "to be," in the heart. For his part, Becker unsettled by a girl's smile that finds its way to him, thinks of her and wonders if she, too, hears his voice in his nights of loneliness.

Weiselberger refers to the internees' caged existence with similar imagery. His short story "Kain und Abel in Kanada" provides a vivid description of the meaning of imprisonment. The barbed wire of the compound is strung from post to post, the tops of which are set at an angle; they remind Weiselberger of gallows and of death:

Genau 483 Galgen . . . Und an jedem Galgen hing—unsichtbar—eine Leiche, etwas, was man verloren hatte, das Leben, das richtige Leben—können, die Arbeit, der Beruf, Erfolg, das Haus, in dem man gewohnt hatte, eine liebgewordene Bequemlichkeit, ein Mensch, den man lieb



hatte, die Heimat—sie selbst, die Gefangenen, hingen daran, die traurigen Schatten ihrer selbst. An jedem Galgen hing etwas . . .

(Weiselberger 1981, 63)

For Weiselberger life in the barbed wire compound was a kind of "absurd theater" and the inmates were "ridiculous and tragic marionettes moving restlessly before never-changing scenery and a backdrop of grey wooden huts, brown earth and dark green forests" (1981, 64). He refers to their life as a caged existence "between barbed wire and camp latrine" (1981, 81).

The entire range of events beginning with Hitler's rise to power and the consequences for these Jews—persecution, flight to England, internment, transfer to Canadian camps, etc.—forms the subject of their writings. Many of the titles are indicative of the thematic focus on the barbed wire cage and of its meaning of isolation, and of lack of belonging: "Internierung" (Gert Baumgart), "Wie ich interniert wurde" (Robert Brückner), "Kempton Park" (Walter Schechner), "Douglas, Isle of Man" (Baumgart), i.e., names of camps in Britain or their equivalents in Canada: "Trois Rivières" (Baumgart); "Hebräische Geschichte der Internees," and numerous others.

Much of the rather heterogeneous literature from the internment camps in Canada, as Seyfert pointed out for Britain, is concerned with seeking self-understanding and reestablishing identity (Seyfert 1984, 65ff.). As Germans unwanted by Germany, but interned and deported by those from whom they had sought asylum, these imprisoned outsiders had a need to ask for reasons and to attempt to reestablish for themselves and the world outside who they were. In a poem entitled "Freiheit," Robert Turgel asks the question why he, who had no part in Hitler's Germany and fled, should be interned, why he had to leave his wife, his children, his homeland; and he prays that the time until he will be free again may pass quickly. "Draht, Draht, Draht," a poem by Robert Unger, describes how the ubiquitous barbed wire has changed their lives into stupefying, grey monotony with a sense of loneliness and isolation that he calls "ein rostig abgestelltes Sein." Images of rails, the railway and of railway stations ("The Last Station" by Lothar Seewald), are used to refer to this isolation. Becker's "Song vom Nebengleise" deals with the journey and sojourn of the internees, who have been shunted onto a side-track.

Many internees felt a need to distance themselves from those responsible for their state of affairs. Sometimes this need finds expression in feelings of hate and revenge, as for example in Weiselberger's short story "Weekend im Hotel Braunau," where he lets a flood wipe out, even though only for a moment, the hated Nazis who had gathered there (unpubl. ms. in Weiselberger Collection). Some internees responded to this need by consciously seeking a new identity; the best example, Kreisel, resolved in the wake of these events to change his medium of expression from German to English and consciously to embrace the new identity that comes from immersing oneself in the new language and culture (Kreisel 1982, Riedel 1986).



The internees' attempts to understand the reasons and events leading to their internment and to come to terms with their absurd existence in the camps led inexorably to the essential question of their Jewishness. Weiselberger observes in one of his short stories that the world had made it so difficult for the Jews to be simply human beings ("Gebet," unpubl. ms. in Weiselberger Collection). The eternally wandering Jew, homeless, persecuted, fleeing from country to country, is a central protagonist of much of this literature: We encounter him in Weiselberger's short story, "Kain und Abel in Kanada." Cain has the legendary mark upon his forehead; he is restless, driven from one thing to the next, persecuted, fleeing from his enemies and from himself, desperate, rebellious, with a clenched fist, longing for and dreaming of freedom and life elsewhere, but in a cage, even in the New World: "Wie ein ewiger Wanderer, ruhelos, wandert er durchs Lager und kann es nie erwandern. Ein hoher, schwarzer Schatten, Kain, der Wanderer, der Ewige Wanderer—Kain—" (1981, 69-70).

In literature written retrospectively, Kreisel and Weiselberger have used the well-known literary motif of the lost shadow to portray the exile experience. In his radio play *He Who Sells His Shadow* (originally published in 1956), an adaptation of Adalbert von Chamisso's novella *Peter Schlemihl*, Kreisel relates the shadowlessness of his protagonist to the experience of loss of identity and consequently of being considered as an outsider. Kreisel's Schlemihl is without a shadow, "different, an alien" (Kreisel 1985, 218), a "stranger upon the earth, an exile, cut off at the root from his fellow men" (Kreisel 1985, 212), "judged," "marked like Cain" (Kreisel 1985, 222-23); he is clearly related to the wandering Jew, rootless, homeless, shunned, condemned and persecuted. Weiselberger repeatedly resorted to this same motif of being shadowless in newspaper articles (e.g., "Ottawa Citizen," 11 Oct. 1947) as well as in explaining the purpose of his cameo portraits of German and Austrian writers. It is significant in this context to note that he wrote these in Canada in order to reestablish and clarify for himself his affinity to an intellectual tradition that had been "perverted and betrayed" (Vordtriede 1968, 570) during the time of the Third Reich (Weiselberger 1982).

Significantly, however, the thoughts and longings of the internees transcend the barbed wire compound. They are directed either to things and events from their past which give them hope—their homeland, friends, or more generally to an idealized former chapter of their lives, or else to the future: release from imprisonment, freedom and a new beginning. Weiselberger's internee protagonists Cain and Abel think of their former lives: Cain, an author, is described as having a clenched fist, as being desperate, willing to end his life, because his "work," "the fruit" which gave meaning to his life, had been destroyed in the book burning organized by the Nazis; Abel, also a writer from the Old World who had lost everything, begins, in contrast, to write anew, despite all adversity. And in his short story "Die Geige," Weiselberger describes Internee No. 412, Klaus, an artist, a gifted violin player, who before his internment had played in concerts in Germany and England. He waits



desperately for his violin, which had been following him from camp to camp but never reached him:

Die Geige. Wenn er sie nur hätte! Spielen. Wieder spielen können. Sich hinwegspielen über alles, über den Stacheldraht, über die dumpfen Massenschlafhütten, das Einerlei dieser Massenausspeisung an den langen rohen Holztischen dreimal täglich, über diese Gierigen, Böswilligen, durch lange Haft Verrohten und Verbitterten. (1981, 104)

In a number of poems, Becker has successfully created a mood of both pain and longing through use of imagery. In "Kleines Herbstlied," falling leaves remind him of death and dying, but the songs of the winds symbolize his dreams and longings. In "Oktober tag am St. Lorenzstrom," a real image, a woman passing the barbed wire before a peaceful landscape panorama of the pastel colors of the changing leaves of fall and the blue color of the horizon, is contrasted with an imaginary one: a woman left behind in war-torn Europe. And in "Es sang die sanfte Geige," the magic tune of a violin, for a moment, brings life back into the compound in the form of images remembered from the past. In "Über dem dunklen Strome," the images of the St. Lawrence River, of the steamers going eastward, direct the poet's thoughts and feelings homeward to his sweetheart in war-torn Europe. However, despite his sadness, of which Becker says in "Traurigkeit zur Nacht," that it falls on him at night from the ceiling in heavy, viscous drops, he resolves to sing his new song ("Neues Lied"), which, like a falcon, defiantly rises over the stormy seas and will bring victory. In a sophisticated poem entitled "Möwenflug," Becker captures the flight of a seagull in order to portray his own longing for freedom.

The internees' most intense longing is for release. Internee No. 725 in Weiselberger's short story "Internee Julius Caesar" dreams of freedom. In his dream, the Quebec-stove of the camp hut, against which two internees had leaned some wheels, reminds him of a steam locomotive whose wheels suddenly began to turn; he dreams

... daß er und die anderen Gefangenen ihre Betten, so wie sie dastanden mit Matratzen, Decken und Eßnäpfen und Löffeln an die Ofenmaschine ankoppelten und dampfend aus der Hütte fuhren, quer übers Lagerfeld, durch den Stacheldraht hindurch, in die Welt, in die Freiheit hinaus, nach Amerika hinüber, geradewegs bis an den Fuß der Freiheitsstatue von New York. (1981, 74)

Feelings of longing for freedom are expressed in the same symbolism in a drawing by E. Reich in which an internee behind a strand of barbed wire looks at the distant Statue of Liberty and the American flag ("Gay and Serious Poetry").

Literature and related art forms served a functional purpose in the camps. Most of it was written with an audience in mind or performed before an audience. Audience involvement or participation by way of recitation in word, song or dramatic performance not only served as entertainment but also helped to raise the prisoners' joint awareness or



consciousness by creating among them a feeling of solidarity which contributed to making the absurdity of life in the camp more bearable. In addition to the poems which were read or recited before groups of internees, a significant number of poems and rhymes describing the internees' experiences contained refrains that involved the audience directly in a collective response. A humorous rhyme by Sawady describing in several stanzas the events leading to internment and life in the camp contains the refrain "Und dennoch haben wir uns köstlich amüsiert." Another poem by Bretschneider dealing with the same well-known sequence of events calls for the joint refrain "Ja, wir sind ja auch in Kanada." Another, entitled "Freut euch des Lebens," also by Sawady, is a parody of a popular German folksong and contains the refrain "Freut euch des Lebens, wenn ihr auch hier interniert. 'Sist alles vergebens. Solang der Humor nicht krepirt." German folksongs not only served as a useful basis for parodies but also easily assured audience participation. The well-known "Weißt du wieviel Sternlein stehen?" occurs in a Canadian internment context as "Weißt du wieviel Internierte sind zur Zeit im Lager 'R'?" A parody of Heine's "Lorelei" by an anonymous writer begins with the remark "Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten, daß ich in Kanada bin" and concludes with an observation about the absurdity of this confinement. A camp song entitled "Lagerlied von Seaton" (Text: Corvin; Music: Landsberg) contains a significant refrain with a message, a call to tough it out:

Kopf hoch! Das hier wird vorübergehen.  
Wie Wolken und Regen und Windeswehn!  
Ein Tag hier wird der letzte sein!  
Tor auf! Wir marschieren in die Freiheit hinein!  
Nach Hause, Kamerad!  
Die Pause, Kamerad, ist vorbei!

("Gay and Serious Poetry")

The best-known camp song was Freddy Grant's "You'll get used to it" which he had written and sung in Huyton and which became popular in Camps "Q" and "N" in Canada and was sung by everyone including the guards (Koch 1980, 94). This humorous song, too, contains a simple, unsentimental message of encouragement. Clearly, participation in group recitations and in songs not only contributed to overcoming the real boredom and stupor in the camps; it had for many a kind of therapeutic function in preventing feelings of resignation, sentimentality, brooding and depression.

The humorous songs mentioned above are but a small part of a larger whole: namely, the importance of musical and theatrical performances in general in the camps. For example, Camp "B" had an unusual number of musically talented inmates, among them Helmut Blume, who much later became dean of music at McGill University, as well as the noted pianist John Newmark. Regular concerts with programs of compositions by Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart, Chopin and numerous others took place in the camp. Blume commented in retrospect on



the importance of music in the camps: "We had concerts, and I think that in this particular atmosphere and environment of uncertainty and fear, music helped a great deal to reestablish a kind of balance and a kind of hope" (Rasky 1981, 37-38).

Closely related in function was the entire gamut of theatrical activity in the camps, ranging from performances of plays by well-known writers to the writing and performing of the prisoners' own plays and skits. The Eric Koch-Files (National Library, Ottawa) contain evidence of camp performances of the following plays: Goethe, *Faust*; Schnitzler, *Der grüne Kakadu*; Shaw, *The Man of Destiny* and *Androcles and the Lion* (Camp "B"). This latter play was described in an introduction by the internee Newmark as showing "people in their fears, hopes and weaknesses" and was said to contain a message for the internees in its last words, spoken by Androcles himself: "No cage for you, and no slavery for me." (Koch-Files, vol. 1). Furthermore Emmet Lavery's *The First Legion* was performed in Camp "N." In the camp newspaper *The Stackeldraht* [sic] (Nov. 1941), performances of Hofmannsthal, Chekhov and Wilde are mentioned. Two original dramatic texts by Paul Dornberger (*The Last Chance* and *Der junge König*) are mentioned in the literature (Seyfert 1984, 67), but the texts seem to have been lost. I have received a manuscript of a playlet by Richard Hoff which clearly recognizes its functional value as humorous entertainment and pastime in a camp where people do not know what to do with time. It is entitled "Rotkäppchen," and is modeled on the Socratic dialogue. It shows a group of internees investigating the practical application of the Socratic dialogue in a camp where everyone has time and is silently waiting for it to pass. When one of the speakers begins half a minute late, it raises the question whether, after wasting half a minute, it is still worthwhile beginning at all. After half an hour of attempting to define the nature of the word "little," as in the Little Red Riding Hood of the title, the outcome is one of apparent pointlessness, a comment on how time has been wasted in a situation where time does not matter anyway: "So?—Das hätten Sie uns aber wirklich gleich zu Anfang sagen können statt uns hier eine ganze Stunde aufzuhalten."

Weiselberger's short stories contain a surprisingly high number of references to games, skits or psychodramas that the internees thought up or played. In his story, "Internee Julius Caesar," Weiselberger comments on both the motives and the significance of such games:

... sie wollten heraus, sie wollten sich herauswickeln aus diesem ewigen Einerlei, aus diesem ewigen Gefangenensband, sie wollten aus ihrer eigenen Haut heraus, irgendwie, und sei's auch nur im Spiel, sich verwandeln, ein anderer werden, ein völlig anderer. (1981, 75)

Internee No. 801, who entertains his fellow internees with surprisingly convincing impersonations of Julius Caesar, forgets to put down the right hand he had raised in salute at roll call so that for his provocative gesture he is locked up by the guards.

Another story of an impersonation game, "Der Mann mit den



tausend Gesichtern" by Weiselberger, also expresses the internees' longing to be elsewhere, "in another world . . . far from here, in a world without barbed wire, and without watchtowers and machine guns, without mass sleeping-huts, without roll-call" (1981, 84). The highlight is a stage-show with Chamaeleoni, a versatile improviser, who could convincingly assume the faces of people as different as Charlie Chaplin, Hitler, Churchill, or even a statue of stone or marble. The second part is a fantasy in which Chamaeleoni actually impersonates the sergeant at the camp gate so convincingly that the camp gate is opened before him and he experiences for a few moments his dream of freedom. He describes it with these words:

Frei . . . endlich frei sein . . . die breite Straße hinunter, durch den Wald nach der Grenze, nach Amerika hinüber . . . New York . . . Chicago . . . wiederum ein Mensch sein . . . auftreten . . . Geld verdienen . . . in den Zeitungen stehen . . . auf großen Plakaten . . . Chamaeleoni, Chamaeleoni, der Mann mit den tausend Gesichtern. . . . (1981, 91)

However, after only a few hours of freedom when he recognizes that the world beyond the barbed wire is a totally foreign world, he returns willingly to the familiarity and security of the compound.

Weiselberger's use of the game motif in situational comedies underlines perhaps the most important ingredient of the prisoners' attempts to come to terms with the absurdity of life in the camps. Humor provides a way of looking at things from another perspective that makes potentially destructive experiences bearable. Many of the artistic statements cast a deliberately humorous light on the absurdity of their situation. A cartoon drawing from the camp anthology mentioned earlier conveys the message of the absurdity of the internee's experience from a perspective which reveals not a small measure of black humor: It is a picture in two parts; part one shows a pathetic little human figure with its head hanging low—evidently a refugee—being marched away by two officers in SS uniforms; the variation below shows the same pathetic figure being marched away again, this time by two sprightly-looking guards armed with bayonets and clad in Canadian military uniforms. Another example is Prinz's "Chanakkagedicht." It is a humorous, satiric look at the fate of the Jews in the context of internment. He interprets their exodus from a country with a vision of more *Lebensraum* to a Promised Land which is both reminiscent of Canaan in name, and also a land of plenty ("und alles gibt's im Überfluß: Schnee, Nordlicht, Chipmunks, Chlor und Seife"). Their misfortune is considered more as good fortune, and all of it happened without their having had to pay a cent for their passage or their board and lodging; on the contrary, a form of free entertainment with bayonet scenes was thrown in to boot: "Und man genießt als Operette die aufgepflanzten Bajonette."

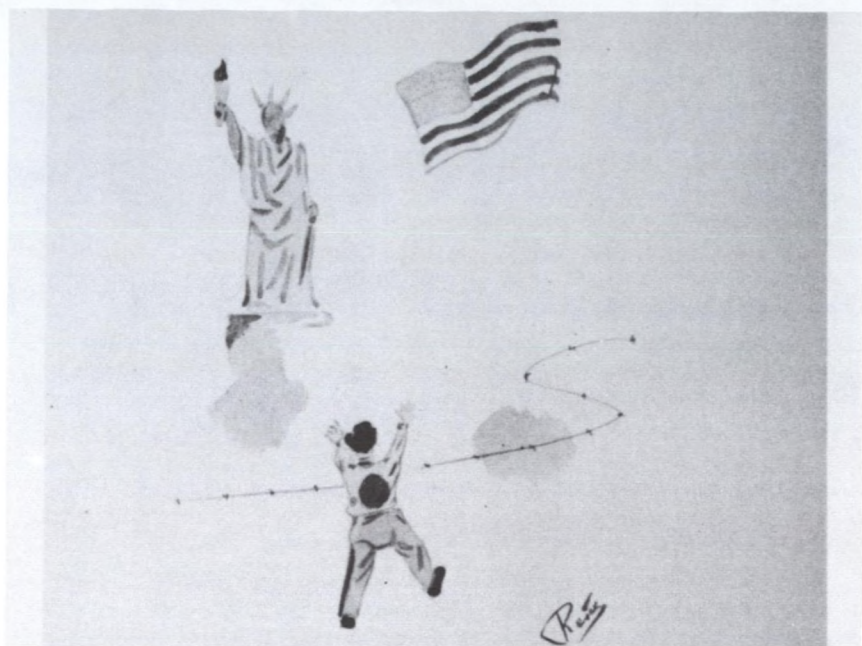
Healthy interned males (only) from sixteen to sixty years of age developed their own sexual fantasies, longings and frustrations. How they dealt with them, too, ranges from sincerely expressed longings for





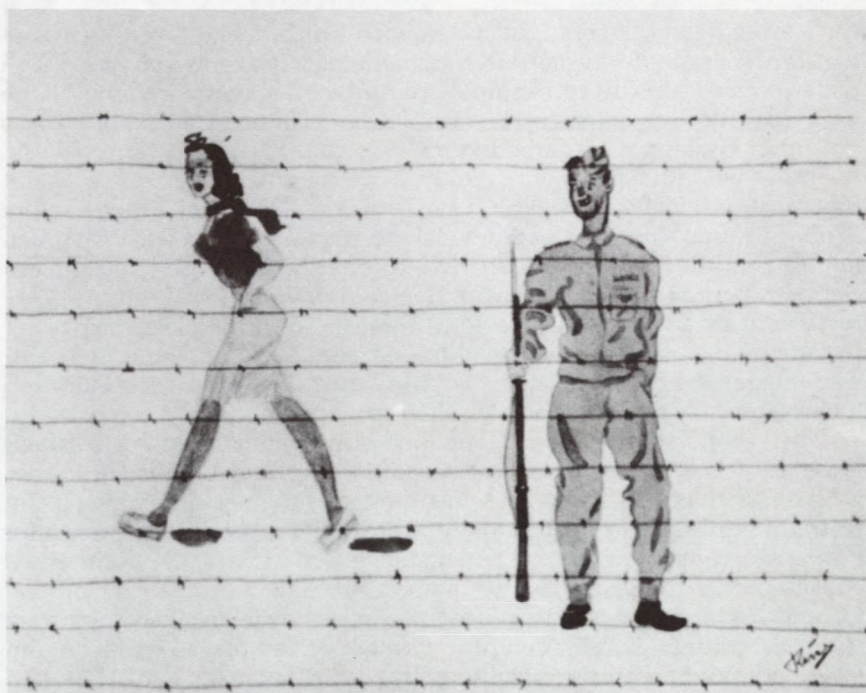
Drawings from Canadian Internment Camps, 1940-41.





Drawings from Canadian Internment Camps, 1940-41.





Drawings from Canadian Internment Camps, 1940-41.



their sweethearts, lovers, and wives, whom they had had to leave in war-torn Europe, to humorous treatment in word, song or drawing. I have referred already to examples of sincere expression; some of the more realistically explicit and beautiful dreams underlie such art work as "Woman Walking Past Barbed Wire," Reich's "Nude At Sunset" and his nude who found her way into the camp bunk bed. Perhaps one of the most original fantasies in this context is Seewald's poem "Ein Wunschtraum," a vision of a new island paradise called Isle of Women (an analogy to the Isle of Man, where one of the biggest internment camps was situated). In the poem, Seewald proclaims that internees are to be sent by government decree to this island for the sole purpose of producing the next generation: "Mit Leib und Seele bei Tag und Nacht/ Zu schlagen die Erzeugerschlacht," until they die "aus Über-Zeugung" which ironically translates as both "overprocreating" and "conviction."

The second stanza of the "Lagerlied von Seaton" contains a salient message: "Das Trauern, das hat niemals Sinn, und Lachen tut immer gut." The internees knew the meaning of laughter as a relief from restraint and as a survival strategy against the absurdity of the camp. Perhaps no one knew this better than a certain Mr. Cohen, an internee considered as the camp fool by some, but as a wise man by others. Cohen was the target of a great deal of mischief by fellow internees: they stole his mattress, bombarded him with water and played tricks on him to the point where things finally became unbearable for him. He called everyone together and tersely announced "Wenn ihr nicht sofort aufhört, verlasse ich das Lager" (Nielsen 1977, 196). Humor, as a strategy in coming to terms with, indeed as a means of surviving internment, deserves a study of its own.

The literature from the fortunately brief interlude of internment in Canadian camps, along with related forms of artistic expression in drawing, music and theater, forms a record of internees' experiences and their attempts to come to terms with the absurdity of the events in a turbulent time. The arts had a functional purpose in the prisoners' search for meaning. They were a significant component in a process of reaching self-understanding, reorientation, and of surviving the adversities of the camp; they also served as a preparation for a new beginning. Weiselberger interpreted the internees' attempts at literary expression as a modern variation of the well-known Boccaccio motif, in which people fleeing from the plague shut themselves off and passed their time by telling stories. This motif could be extended to refer to their entire search for meaningful intellectual activities, including their educational programs and endeavors. Indeed many internees, by their own admission, derived formative influences and benefits from human and intellectual encounters in the camps, influences that were to determine many of their goals and indeed the orientation of their entire lives. Rasky's CBC documentary "The Spies That Never Were," which focused on the internees in retrospective interviews, shows that the internees considered internment as an unfortunate interlude at the time, but that in retrospect they bear no grudge against Canada, for it was for many a period of enforced reflection, of intellectual activity, of searching for and



defining their goals. A disproportionate number of internees, especially of the younger generation, went on to studies at universities and later made significant contributions to intellectual life in Canada and the United States in the arts and the sciences (Koch 1980, Draper 1983). As far as literature is concerned, such former internees as Henry Kreisel, Carl Weiselberger, Anton Frisch, Eric Koch and Charles Wassermann have made a contribution to the literature of Canada in both English and German (Riedel 1984, Gürtler [in press]). The "accidental immigrants" have indeed enriched their country despite the restrictive immigration policies of those times.

University of Victoria  
Victoria, British Columbia

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